FALL 2014 / VOLUME XX / ISSUE I

THE MUSLIM VOICE

MOVING BEYOND UNIVERSITY

A LETTER TO MY **18 YEAR OLD SELF** PG08

CATCH-UP WITH **ALUMNI** PG15

AFTER **GRADUATION** PG20

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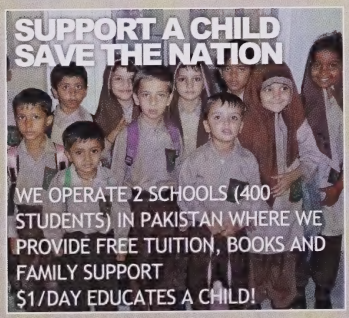

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BY AHMAD DIAB MARZOUK

Assalamu Alaikoum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh,

This academic year marks the 50th Year Anniversary of the Muslim Students' Association (MSA) at the University of Toronto, St. George. What humbly began with organizing Friday Prayers at Hart House, has now become a platform for servitude of Allah through service of humanity. Whether you want to serve Allah through Photography, Graphic Design, Web Design, Religious Education, or World and Social Justice, the MSA has a platform for you. This transformation did not come about as a result of one individual's work. Rather, by the grace of Allah, it came about as the result of years of hard work and sacrifice from dedicated teams throughout the course of the club's history. As inheritors of this legacy, we are indebted to our predecessors for what the MSA has been able to achieve to this day.

But what is the MSA? Is it a student club? An organization? A company? Different individuals have different perspectives on this question. My personal view is that the MSA represents a community, and strives to be one. You can come to the MSA simply being yourself and you will be accepted. Forming a community is not something simple and does not come on its own.

The Prophet Muhammad, Peace and Blessings Be Upon Him, has given us instruction which, if implemented, nurtures love and belief in our lives. He said: "You will not enter Paradise until you believe, and you will not believe until you love one another. Shall I not tell you about something which, if you do it, you will love one another? Spread salaam amongst yourselves." [Muslim]

Do not hesitate to greet and reach out to your fellow community members, even if they are younger or older than you. It may sometimes seem difficult, but this aspect of community is integral as it gives you and me a home, and more importantly, a path to paradise.

If you are reading these words then know that you have been awarded a blessing that others do not have: the gift of life. This gift is a precious one, because with it we strive to attain the pleasure of Allah through doing good deeds. This gift, however, is a temporal one; one in which its end is unknown to us, and it is incumbent on us to take advantage of it while it is still with us.

You can choose to join the MSA, and if there is no MSA in your midst, then form your own and allow for others to join. The MSA, at its core, is a group of individuals with the intention of serving Allah, and there is nothing to prevent individuals from collectively coming together to achieve that end, whether it is within or outside university life.

A belated Eid Mubarak to you, and I pray that Allah blesses you in this life and the next.

EDITOR'S ADDRESS

BY AMINA MOHAMED

Assalamu Alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakaatu,

Jazakallahu khair for picking up the latest edition of The Muslim Voice. Every year we seek to discuss issues we feel are pertinent to the student experience, ones that speak to the present struggles of scholarship and the difficulty of building a social life around visits to the library. While these discussions are always relevant to the student population, they dance around the temporal and experimental boundaries of campus life; after all, a writer is meant to write what they know. Outside of our four to fourteen years of academic life our small tidbits of knowledge create conversations that overlook our overwhelming, though collective, end: a life outside the university, (allahhuma ameen). This subject is so seldom taken up for fear of discussions entrenched in financial ruin and economic despair, which is a fair conclusion. However, without broaching these subjects the only ones to enter the game unprepared will be us. To adopt a Prufrockian fear of the overwhelming question is to set ourselves up for failure.

This year the TMV intends to ask this question: what happens to us when we graduate? What happens when we no longer belong to a community that seeks to highlight and hone our intellectual skills and make us critical, engaged members of society? How does one become what they have been trained to become, whether that be a doctor, engineer, or expert in Shakespeare? How does one maintain a friendship that began out of convenience and blossomed into a sisterhood if one's cities of origin are separate from one's university town? How does one adult?

The TMV will occupy itself with fostering debate and discussion on a topic with which many are not entirely familiar, and it is this unfamiliarity that ignites our curiosity. Incidentally, these discussions fall in the year of the MSA's 50th anniversary, adding an interesting layer to the conversation; namely, how one's connection to their MSA or their masjid forms their identity and how this formation adds to one's life experience.

In this issue, we focus primarily on the social and relationship ties that begin in university, and the ways in which one can nurture them so that they become entities whose origins –though tied to the university- do not affect their future. We began with the hope of shining a light on the concept of a life beyond our walls and as such we present to you a compilation of takes on the importance of communication despite a degree in the sciences, of the benefits of the sunnah of the Prophet (saw) and the advice one writer would give to herself is she could start U of T all over again. Through this, I, at least, have learned that we all take different lessons from similar experiences, and that engaging with those which whom you share few academic or social similarities present the most enlightening opinions.

There are many avenues with which to begin this journey, and we are grateful that you chose the TMV to be your guide. May Allah make all of our paths easy, fruitful and a means to remember Him.
Ameen.

Amina Mohamed
Editor-in-Chief

PHOTO // RYAN MCGUIR

TO MY 18 YEAR OLD SELF

BY SANIA KHAN

Dear Younger Sania,

This is Older Sania. Not much older, a mere two years to be exact. I know, two years cannot possibly seem like enough time to have gained an adequate amount of experience, knowledge, and wisdom, enough to make me qualified to issue you advice that will hopefully benefit you upon entering university. Well, you are sorely mistaken, Younger Sania. In these next two years you will grow more than ever before, you will make countless mistakes, and you will learn a multitude of lessons. This is why I bring to you this letter of the dos and don'ts of being a well-rounded university student. Even if you end up taking away only a minor detail from this entire letter, I will consider my job done.

1. **VALUE YOUR PARENTS.** Throughout your life, you have been guilty of taking your parents for granted— as is the case with many your age. But, it will be in your young adulthood that you gain a firmer understanding as to what it means to be a first generation Pakistani-Canadian, whose parents selflessly plucked themselves out of the comfort of their own lives in order to work odd jobs, move a handful of times, and visit their parents sporadically for the sake of your future. On those days when you feel defeated by a gruelingly lengthy essay or overwhelmed by an especially demanding schedule, remember your parents. They have tirelessly and unapologetically sacrificed their own happiness in order to bring you to your feet. For this reason, it is up to you to elevate them to the highest peaks of fulfillment and pride with your accomplishments— in this dunya and in the Hereafter. Moreover, I know you're a self-proclaimed stubborn independent but do not exert your freedom at the cost of your parents' approval. Mess that up and you will go absolutely no where in life. I know that sounds like a threat. That's because it is. If you don't believe me, give it a few years. You will begin to notice patterns, like how when you do something your parents disapprove of, those decisions you were once so sure of will quickly turn sour. Also, you will notice when you have friends that your parents disapprove of, that those friendships will rarely last. Your parents also have complete rights over you. Yes, they will exercise their control over you in ways that you may object to, such as installing a curfew. But you better darn well accept those curfew rules with a smile on your face, because while they are enforcing rules, they are also going to allow you to live in a country halfway across the world by yourself. Understand that at the end of the day your parents only want what is best for you and more often than not they are absolutely right. With your parents' blessings you can and will achieve everything you have ever desired for yourself and then some. Give them no reason to complain and every reason to feel pride in you and your accomplishments.

2. **THE TRULY WISE LEARN FROM OTHER PEOPLE'S MISTAKES.** You are going to be in situations that will make you feel uncomfortable and out of place. Good. Sometimes, being uncomfortable can be one of the most beautiful experiences to endure. Through discomfort, your awareness for others' social cues and triggers will become refined, your empathy for others' feelings will be strengthened, and you will be more attuned to your own boundaries. Even though you must inevitably experience discomfort in order to reach this level of self-actualization, remember that you should never do anything while under pressure. I know this is an age-old rule, but you would be surprised at how it is something you will have to deal with for the rest of your life. Pressure will not come in the form of the exaggerated tagline, "Come on! Everyone's doing it!" It will come in the form of your colleagues who will expect you to go to the bar with them after work. It will come in the form of the b.y.o.b (bring your own beer) parties you will regret not attending because everyone in your class showed up. It will even come in the form of questioning eating halal because you are the only one amongst your friends who does so. Though your boundaries are relatively loose and accommodating, there are certain things that are not worth experiencing— no matter how socially accepted they may be. In the next few years, you will gain a stronger sense of your limits and boundaries; do not loosen your grip on them. The one piece of advice I have for you in those moments where you may feel pressured to test your own limits is to live vicariously through others. You will be surprised at how much this technique works. As a result, you will learn valuable and imperative life lessons without having to make the mistakes yourself.

3. **LEAVE AN IMPRESSION.** You willingly chose to enter the University of Toronto's St. George campus when you knew full well that co-op is not provided to liberal arts students there is no guarantee of opportunities at this campus. In other words, nothing will be served to you on a silver platter. Yes, you will have the blessing of having wonderful family and friends who will connect you to potential opportunities, but you are responsible for opening those doors yourself. What is the best way to do so? Stick out. Professors play a pivotal role in your university career, but you are competing with hundreds of students at a time. To leave an impression on these potential references, mentors and employers, sit in the front of class, visit their office hours, and make sure they remember your name. And to those students who label you a "keener" for doing so, allow it. Because that's exactly who you are and it is completely awesome. However, a university career goes beyond the classroom, so you are also responsible for sticking out in your extracurricular ventures as well. Branch out and connect with your peers and colleagues by joining clubs, attending academic events, and participating in social events. But, do not spread yourself too thinly. Join only those clubs and initiatives that align with your interests and passions. As a result of integrating yourself heavily into your university, you will connect with some of the greatest people you will ever meet all the while proactively responding to those issues that are closest to your heart.

4. **ALLOW YOURSELF TO EXIST, FREE OF OTHERS' OPINIONS.** There will be countless incidences at family dinner parties where you will be asked the inevitable, "what is it that you plan on doing with your degrees, dear?" To which a lineup of aunties will turn to you in a synchronized fashion, equal parts curiosity and judgment in their facial expressions. You will then proceed to reply, "law, aunty." This response will

PHOTO // CHELSEA GABRIEL

consequently be followed by whispers of approval, some doubt, and more judgment. But, who are you trying to kid? You know you do not want to attend law school. Or at least I don't think you do. Truth be told, I am still trying to figure that out myself. And that is completely okay. You are not meant to have things figured out by now. And if someone in their undergrad ever makes it seem like they know exactly where they are headed in life, they are lying. None of us truly know exactly what we are doing and where we are going. As a learner, you are in one of the most important stages of your life. Granted, learning should never end, but you are lucky in that your age right now allows for you to prioritize education before anything else. To have the opportunity to listen to a professor who has had experience in her/his own field, to read texts that teach you new words and concepts, and to critique information that you receive are all incredible blessings. Further envelope yourself into this role as a learner beyond the classroom setting as well; engage in effective dialogue, relearn and unlearn familiar concepts, question absolutely everything. As a learner, you must also recognize the fact that you do not have the answer to everything. Believe me, you will meet at least one of those kinds of people every single day, the kind that lead on that they know more than they actually do about a subject. Before forming an opinion on a subject, make sure you understand everything about it first. If you do not have a sound understanding on the topic at hand, a simple "I can't comment on [said subject] because I don't know enough about it, but I will actively learn more," will suffice. By being a student even outside of the classroom you will take away so much more from your university experience than you anticipated.

5. DO NOT FORCE SOMETHING THAT IS ALREADY PRE-DESTINED FOR YOU. You should know this from experience. In the past, you have been badly bruised by those you considered to be your friends. You have been deceived, backstabbed, and left alone in some of your darkest moments yet you have always had this unshakeable faith that you would eventually meet those friends who would show you your worth. Well, I am pleased to assure you that all that wishing and waiting will eventually pay off. You will be surrounded by some of the most supportive, intelligent, giving, loving, like-minded and caring people. So, what changed? For starters, the way you will make these friends is different from before. In the past, you cared more about being accepted by the wrong crowd, and in doing so you had put your values, morals and personal well-being aside in order to fulfill those toxic friendships. But, the sooner you realize that you have a destiny that has already been written out for you by Allah, you will not be so eager to push forward a relationship that may or may not be what Allah has planned for you. Have faith in knowing that what is destined for you will come your way inshAllah. All you have to focus on is being the most genuine, authentic person you can possibly be. The rest will come naturally. If even for a moment you notice that you are presenting an exaggerated version of yourself in order to be liked or accepted by someone, stop. They are not worth it. Of course, loss is inevitable in life. You cannot prevent it. So anticipate that along the way, you will lose friendships just as you will gain them. But do not let this fact jade you. Let it propel you to shower those around you with as much earnest companionship as possible during the limited time you have together.

6. DEVOTE YOURSELF TO WHOEVER IS RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU AT THIS EXACT MOMENT. Do not allow for the comfort of knowing you have a pre-destined future to result in the arrogance of not putting time, energy and effort into others. The beauty of all human interaction is that there is always one point of commonality that connects your life to someone else's. When interacting with someone, maintain strong eye contact and have your body language reflect theirs. Also, actively try to feel their emotions and empathize with their struggles, be patient with their boundaries, and provide your undivided attention at all times. Why? Because when you work on making sure others feel understood rather than focusing on being understood, you end up accomplishing the former while still achieving the latter.

7. NOT EVERYTHING IS ABOUT YOU. Oftentimes when we are blessed with intelligent minds, socially acceptable looks and understanding hearts, we make the grave mistake of regarding those characteristics as self-produced. None of what you are or how you look is your own doing, and do not for even a moment think otherwise. As soon as you do, you will find yourself ridden with pride, arrogance and ego. These attributes are often thought to be ones that are present. For instance, when an individual speaks to you in a condescending manner, it is clear that a certain amount of pride is present. But something not enough people remember is that pride, arrogance and ego can also be perceived in the absence of something. For instance, when you miss someone but refuse to do anything about it, your silence comes out of your ego. When you are thinking of a compliment for someone but refuse to verbalize it to them so not to boost their self-confidence, that is out of arrogance. So, if there is anything you should take away from this letter, it is this: remove yourself from the equation. If someone is hurting, do not think about your own pain and burdens while helping them. If someone is happy, do not compare their happiness to your own. If someone needs you, do not think about how those around you do not recognize that you may also be in need of them. Stop connecting everything to yourself. If ever you find that this is happening, do one of the following at that very moment, go for a hike, go to a large body of water, watch the sunset, or look up at the sky— take time out of your day to observe His divine creation. As soon as you do, you will be reminded that the world does not revolve around you. You are merely a part of His master plan. The world owes you nothing and you owe Him and His creation everything.

8. LASTLY, I can assure you that in the next two years more good than bad will come your way. But then again, it is all a matter of perspective. In any case, humble yourself with the knowledge that just as you are continuously being tested with hardships, your blessings are also a test of gratitude. As Allah commands in Surah-Ibrahim (Verse 14:7), "If you are grateful, I will surely increase you". One scholar who examines this verse is Ustadh Nouman Ali Khan, who explains how it is not specified in this verse who exactly you should be grateful to and in what and how much He will increase you. SubhanAllah. Show gratitude to whoever you can and whenever possible. Verbalize, validate and appreciate. You have nothing to lose, except for ego, pride and arrogance.

And with that, Younger Sania, I am going to sign off with one final note; do not focus too much on the future or the past. Have tunnel vision in the present and give your all to what is happening right in front of you. Somehow, things will fall into place accordingly, God willing.

Best of luck,
Sania

FACE TO FACE TO FACEBOOK

FRIENDSHIP IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

BY ROSHAAN WASIM

Over the past few decades, the world has been transformed by a phenomenon dubbed as the 'Technological Revolution' by academics and mainstream media. The introduction of the internet combined with increasingly complex and rapidly transforming devices such as the cell phone and the personal computer have radically changed countless aspects of our lives.

One of the most significant milestones in the history of the technological revolution was the introduction of social media, a term that broadly refers to any website or application which allows users to communicate and share information with one another. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram have opened up an immense new set of possibilities for communicating and staying in touch with family and friends. As a result, the experience of maintaining friendships during and after university is vastly different for the present generation of students than it was for the generation of students who graduated more than 20 years ago.

Trying to describe generations and the differences between them is a bit tricky, seeing as even reputable think-tanks and academics disagree about when a generation starts or ends. In general, most researchers agree that "Generation X" refers to those who were born between 1960 and 1984, whereas Generation Y, also referred to as "the Millennials", were born between 1985 and 2000. As such, the members of Generation X would have graduated from university sometime between 1982 and 2005, whereas Millennials have either graduated sometime in the past decade or will graduate in the coming years. Although they are only separated by a couple of decades, the development of increasingly complex forms of social media in the 21st century has led to completely different experiences of friendship for Generation X and Millennial students in university.

It is very difficult to generalize the experiences of any generation that encompasses millions of people, and I am not saying that every member of Generation X or every Millennial conforms rigidly to a certain set of characteristics. It is certainly possible that a member of Generation X used social media during their university years, and even more possible that a Millennial student today does not use social media. In fact, I know several Millennial students who have little to no social media presence. Rather, what this article will attempt to do is provide a broad framework for the constantly evolving meanings attached to friendship in university as a direct result of social media. Keeping in mind that every person ultimately has an individual experience, it is possible to speak generally about certain representative features that are common to a majority of the students in each generation.

Recent years have seen an explosion in the amount of research dedicated to exploring the huge generational gap created by social media. Most studies agree that this gap is essentially caused by the fact that today's older generation is comprised of digital adapters who had to adjust to technological change, whereas the current generation of youth are digital natives who have never known a life without social media.

As digital adapters, most members of Generation X did not have the opportunity to use social media extensively during university, and consequently do not see it as an essential part of their lives. Being able to remember a life without technology, this group of students can see how much technology has changed their world and may even be nostalgic for the time before social media pervaded every part of their lives.

In contrast, Millennial students have such a close relationship with technology and social media that they cannot even describe a world without it. As these students went through university and graduation, they consistently used social media to create an online identity for themselves where everyone has access to their friends list, interests, past experiences and major life events. Being digital natives, the majority of the Millennial students consider their online presence on social media as an integral part of their identity. After graduating from university, not only does technology allow Millennials to communicate over long distances and keep up with one another's lives, but it also allows friendships to develop and deepen purely online without any face-to-face contact.

As a result of these differences, one of the most prominent distinctions among the older and younger generation of students is their approach to creating and maintaining friendships. Although Generation X had the chance to use websites such as MySpace and LiveJournal during their university years, the membership on these websites was nowhere near as large as social media websites today. According to the Pew Research Centre, a major think-tank, 90% of Millennials currently have an active membership on Facebook. This makes today's Millennials the most connected generation in history, with instant access to dozens of their friends online after graduation.

I realized this vast difference among generations as I spoke with my mother

about her experience graduating from university in 1985 in Pakistan, and then compared it to my own experience as I prepare to graduate from the University of Toronto in the coming months.

Although my mother was a social person during her time at university and developed several friendships which she thought would last a lifetime, she eventually lost touch with almost all of her close friends. As she got busier with work and family, and then eventually moved away to Canada, it became more and more difficult to maintain a constant line of communication with her friends. Without cell phones or easily accessible computers in the 80s, the only way to keep in touch for my mother and her friends was through letters, which often took weeks to send and receive over different continents, or through long-distance phone calls, which were often as expensive as $1 per minute.

When I compare my mother's experience with my own, I can see how much of an effect social media has had on my life and my friendships. I am still in touch with almost all of my close friends from high school, even though some of them attend university in different cities and countries. I can attribute this directly to social media platforms such as Facebook and Whatsapp, which have made it easy to instantly send messages to my friends and keep in touch with their lives. In particular, websites such as Facebook where it is common to publish personal information and life updates allow me to feel as though I am a part of the daily occurrences in my friends' lives even if we do not personally speak to each other for a while. As I prepare to graduate, I am not anxious about keeping in touch with my close friends from university despite hearing about my mother's experience. Unlike her, it is very easy for me to contact my friends quickly through Facebook or a text message, even if just for a small meaningless conversation.

In my opinion, this feeling of instant connection with friends is what truly distinguishes the experience of the Generation X students from that of the Millennials. When I asked my mother whether she would still be in touch with her friends if she had access to Facebook in university, she immediately replied yes without a second thought. Instead of writing and mailing a letter, it is infinitely easier to send someone a message over the internet which they can receive and reply to within minutes. Moreover, as more and more people use social media on their smartphones, catching up with friends online can be done literally anywhere and anytime.

The power of social media extends beyond simply connecting people; it can even help with reconnecting old friends to one another. My mother has gotten back in touch with many of her friends from university after finding them online through mutual connections on social media. Recently, she found one of her close friends from university on Facebook after having lost touch with her 15 years ago. Amazingly, both my mother and her friend had moved from Pakistan to Canada after losing contact and had only been living a 5-minute drive away from one another for over a decade. Despite frequently visiting the same places around the city, the two had never bumped into one another. Without social media, it is possible that they could have

"The power of social media extends beyond simply connecting people; it can even help with reconnecting old friends to one another"

spent their entire lives not knowing the other lived such a short distance away.

Clearly, social media has made it easier than ever to remain connected with friends after graduation even over long distances. Yet, though mainstream media rightly calls the Millennials the most connected generation in history, it is not uncommon to hear about students on campus who still feel alone. In a survey conducted last year by The Globe and Mail of more than 30,000 Canadian post-secondary students, 63% said that they feel "very lonely". Ironically, most of these students will probably have hundreds of Facebook friends, but the vast majority of them are mere acquaintances, not true friends who they can turn to when having difficulties.

The results of The Globe and Mail's survey illustrate a crucial fact: no matter how easy social media has made it to stay in touch with friends, simply having an online presence does not automatically lead to friendships. The basic formula for maintaining a friendship has remained fundamentally unchanged over the years. In order to build strong friendships, it is as essential today as it was 30 years ago to put in the appropriate effort. It takes more than a casual message on Facebook or liking someone's post on Instagram to keep up healthy friendships. As such, although social media has made it much easier to stay connected with friends; it is ultimately up to the users to communicate with one another in a substantial manner. While I will probably remain connected online with my university friends for the rest of my life, it is up to me to determine whether we remain close friends or slowly become mere online "Facebook friends."

The generation following the Millennials, which some have begun to label as Generation Z, has an even stronger relationship with social media than its predecessors. As social media continues to evolve at a mind-numbing pace, it will be interesting to see how Generation Z reacts to the challenges and advantages of forming and maintaining friendships online. Seeing as the majority of Generation Z is currently in primary education, at this point we can only speculate as to what extent social media will change their friendship habits. As more and more university classes shift to online lectures and coursework, it might be that Generation Z students form deep friendships among their peers purely online.

The newest forms of social media seem to covertly downplay the importance of meeting someone in person. Applications such as Skype and Facetime are making it easier than ever to argue that physical presence is not truly necessary to maintain a healthy friendship. While I agree that it is entirely possible to build a strong connection with someone purely online without ever meeting, it seems as though even social media such as Skype and Facetime are ultimately poor substitutes for someone's physical presence. As Generation Z students grow up immersed in social media, perhaps they will be so accustomed to online friendships that they will feel no need to move past Facebook. But at least for now, no matter how many conversations I have with my close friends online, I always look forward to meeting them in person and speaking face to face.

WOLFPACK MEMBER TO NOMAD WITH MULTIPLE HOMES

THE SCINTILLATING NETWORK OF UNIVERSITY FRIENDSHIPS

BY NAVEEDA HUSSAIN

ILLUSTRATION BY // SEEMA SHAFEI

While your high school wolf pack will always retain its allure, particularly when it comes to those friends that will always have a treasure trove of photographic blackmail material from the days of your pudgy ninth-grade glory, university opens you up to a completely unimaginable allure of geniuses, hipsters and whack-jobs who you did not think could actually exist, and people that will bring out in you a potential that you never knew you had.

'The Hierarchy of Friendship' was an almost scientific concept I lived by back in high school wherein there are about three solid tiers of friendship: the "hi-bye/ make-small-talk-in-the-hallways" tier, the acquaintance/let's obsess over the TV show or musician we both like because we really don't have much else to talk about tier, and finally at the very top- your posse. Your posse has been with you through thick and thin, and at one point it may have seemed like you connected on every possible level leaving little room for anyone else to supersede that...ever. Your posse will, if you're lucky, always be your posse. However, university completely upends any notion of hierarchy that you thought may have existed by showing you that, if you're open, you will meet people who will intimidate you, and challenge you, and simultaneously cement and cause you to question what you believe in, and teach you things about your surroundings and yourself that you didn't know were possible. It'll dawn on you that friendship is not found in the upper echelons of some theory of high school hierarchies, but in a network of learning, exploration, common and diverging interests, and most importantly, sustained interaction. If you allow yourself to explore, you'll arrive at the simple realization that no one can be everything to you, but everyone can be something.

Once you subtract the pointless squabbles, inflated egos, and competition and comparison, high school friendships are for the most part, simple and beautiful things. Strolling down the hallway after class and heading to your locker where you knew your friends would be waiting for you before you all headed off to the shop that sold what you then thought were Toronto's best potato wedges, was possibly one of life's simplest and most satisfying pleasures. Friendship was a guarantee that you would see the same people, at the same time, in the same place for five of the seven days of the week; and while it was largely convenience, it was all you needed. It was your world. By virtue of the fact that your world is made up of what you know, and what you knew at that point in your life was constrained significantly by what those around you knew - unless you were particularly keen or curious - there wasn't a huge scope for exploration. Your friends' interests morphed into your interests or vice versa almost to a point where it could have gone anywhere from, "I thought that book was okay," to, "we thought it was great!" While that may be a slight or gross exaggeration (based on your own sense of individuality), groupthink eventually led to "group-do" meaning you ended up doing exactly the same activities with exactly the same people even outside of school. High school was this magnificently insulated bubble that made you feel like you were on top of the world, when you were, in fact, quite sheltered. It provided everyone within the bubble with a cushioned safety net, and not only did it safeguard you from the trials and tribulations of the exterior, it kept you from knowing the wonders of what lay beyond.

Then came university. It instantaneously pulled out from beneath you the gigantic raft that you used to keep yourself afloat amidst the volatile waves of the world. There you were, thrown into a classroom that was the population of your entire high school, determined, yet without a clue how, to beat the dreaded 15% grade drop that was destined to plague every first year. Beyond the impending doom of a less than perfect GPA lay an even cruder awakening: you no longer had your safety net. If you were lucky, a couple of your high school friends accompanied you to university; however even then, friendship shed its skin of convenience, and unveiled the process of making a concerted effort to see one another. While that became the prospect of your old friendships, in some ways you now become an awkward teenager again re-learning how to get to know people.... except this time around it's both intimidating and inspiring.

Actively being an overachieving keener in the first two months of university was one of the best decisions I've ever made: it made me want to be more. Within that time frame, I had met a national debating champion, a second year student that explained to me in detail how the American government worked, Harvard Model United Nations students who spoke like seasoned politicians, a hijabi that was one of the Vice Presidents of the Students Union, and professors that opened my eyes to the dynamic intricacies of global governance. Suffice it to say, it was like I had discovered Atlantis. Beyond the awesomeness that enveloped me, I was getting a small glimpse into what it was like to engage with different people who had different interests, and to truly delve into what their interests were instead of internally plotting out the trajectory of our friendship based on the criteria in the back of my head. While the old me would have thought, "Wow this person has some serious best friend potential," the new me was thinking nothing more than, "how cool is it that this person has actually read all of Machiavelli's writings and can casually reference his conceptions of the world in conversation?" When taking each person for what they are and what they have to offer and sharing who you are and what you can offer, you are engaging in what I like to call, the comparative advantage of friendship- in a nutshell, the best way to find the best in others and the best in yourself.

Quick and oversimplified economics lesson: comparative advantage is the theory that there are huge gains to be had from trade when a country or firm specializes in the production of a good that it has an advantage in producing (because of an abundance of natural resources or technological advancements etc.), and trades this good for goods that it cannot produce as efficiently. I.e., everybody wins when America trades its computers for India's silk and spices because America has a huge advantage in the production of computers and India has a huge advantage in the production of silk and spices. Likewise, while I may have a friend who is a scientific genius, I can write an A paper, and we can both benefit by sharing our skillsets with one another. On an even broader level, the comparative advantage of friendship is predicated on the notion that we all have interests, passions, and skills that cause us to shine, and in exchanging, engaging, and exploring them, we open ourselves up to endless possibilities. The fascinating thing is that exploring what drives others is also a project of introspection into thinking about what drives you.

These realizations all happened for me on a trip this summer when I met an engineer that read the Communist Manifesto for pleasure and enjoyed both indie bands and MIA, a law student that was simultaneously an artist, writer, and musician, a fiercely outspoken socialist feminist writer, a widely-traveled student of development with a passion for foreign movies, and a future doctor aspiring to be a Nobel Prize winner that successfully interested an International Relations student (me) in the benefits of good cholesterol! In meeting and interacting with these individuals who were each beautifully contradictory mosaics in their own right, I began to delve deeper into who I was, what I could contribute, what I enjoyed, and what I wanted to explore. Meeting these individuals developed my interest in French cinema and motivated me to focus on my writing and cultivate my craft. Meeting them gave me the courage to even proclaim that I had a craft, and gave me the motivation to explore a side of myself that they helped uncover.

Accompanying this self-actualization process was the realization that while my posse is phenomenal, had I restricted myself, I would never have known more than the bubble that I once thought was infinite. While I could most definitely not take anyone in my posse to a Thursday night session of Soul Food with U of T's own Muslim Chaplaincy, there are the magnificent individuals of the MSA that I could do that with. While the concept of a Friday Night Poetry Slam is nothing short of mind-numbingly dull to some of the soul food attendees, it's an awe-inspiring evening for some of the others. Friendship then, involves the understanding that no single person will share every one of your interests; rather it is the exploration of our multifaceted natures with a multitude of individuals. More importantly, it's this great network of info-sharing, and interest-probing, and discussion-provoking, and belief-challenging, and laugh-inducing fun that is one of the greatest parts of university life. However, keeping up this network, is another story entirely.

As you will realize when it comes to the upkeep of your posse, unless you are lucky enough to live on residence where your closest friends are also your roommates, university friendships are a marked and concerted effort. When you and your friend are both on campus but are actually on the opposite poles of the earth because you are at Victoria College and your friend is at Bahen, unless there is a texting negotiation that ensues on a middle ground meeting territory, you will not see your friends. No network is successful without sustained interaction, regularly planned conferences and forums, and equivalent and meaningful contributions from all parties; the same goes for your friendships. The great thing about coming together over shared interests is that keeping up your friendships is often times as simple as going to Snakes and Lattes together because you and your friends are fiercely competitive and can all appreciate the breathtaking work of art that is a Nutella Latte. While university may be the recruitment ground for your robust and insanely awesome network, it is up to you to sustain and develop that network and take it to heights that you did not know it could reach. Beautiful friendships are forged not through the vague and open ended, "oh my god we should totally grab coffee some time!" but rather through the decisive and intentional "meet me at Starbucks at 2 o clock; we can be basic and Instagram our Pumpkin Spiced Lattes with our misspelt names." #NonNorthAmericanNameProblems. Even if you indulge in a friend's passion, one that just so happens to be an activity that you would not have otherwise approached with a 10-foot pole, these moments make for revelatory experiences and amazing stories and perhaps most importantly, seeing your friend partaking in something close to their heart shows you a side of them that you otherwise would not see. Networks flourish when every member is actively adding value while being made to feel valuable.

Alas, the high school hierarchy topples and the network swoops in to fill that vacuum. From being an almost identical member of a wolf pack, university presents all with the opportunity to emerge from the cocoon and become free-roaming, self-actualizing individuals that are meaningful additions to the world around them. While you may no longer have the safety net of your wolf pack, you have the chance to become a fearless nomad with loving homes in the corners of the world that you happen upon on your elaborate travels. Always allow yourself to explore, for you never know what beauty awaits you.

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENTS' PAST

"I have personally experienced over the past few years that one can anticipate what he can accomplish on his own, but in a group of Muslims, with pure intention and dedication what can be accomplished is far beyond expectations. Through working together in a group, we get the feeling that we are part of one body, as described by the Prophet (sallAllahu alaihi wasalam). As we work together, we learn from each other, and together we help one another to accomplish our goals. But the jama'ah is not only that; it is not only a pillar for work it is a blessing on its own; it is an Islamic environment that is composed of love and people working together for the sake of Allah (subhana wa ta'ala). It is important for you to always remember that you are part of this jama'ah on campus. The MSA belongs to YOU and every Muslim brother and sister on campus"

Khaled Al-Qazzaz
MSA President 2003/2004

"Consider your own unique set of circumstances and set of skills that can be utilized for the betterment of society; reflect upon what you're good at, what your interests are, and in what areas and in what areas you see yourself making a difference. And then apply yourself, join in on the fun, and be one of those who are able to effect change. The MSA is certainly no the only group or means through which you can apply yourself, but we pride ourselves on providing an avenue through which you can apply yourself"

Shuaib Ally
MSA President 2006/2007

"Getting involved in a group like the MSA allows you to learn skills like event-planning, public relations, leadership, teamwork, budgeting and fundraising, networking and much more. Getting involved in extra-curricular activities is also very fulfilling. It's fulfilling because it makes our lives more complete. Despite the importance of our grades, we risk living a very narrow-minded four years if academic achievement is our only purpose. Truth be told, we can only spend so much time studying, and if we don't have other purposes to fill the rest of our time, our time will likely be squandered"

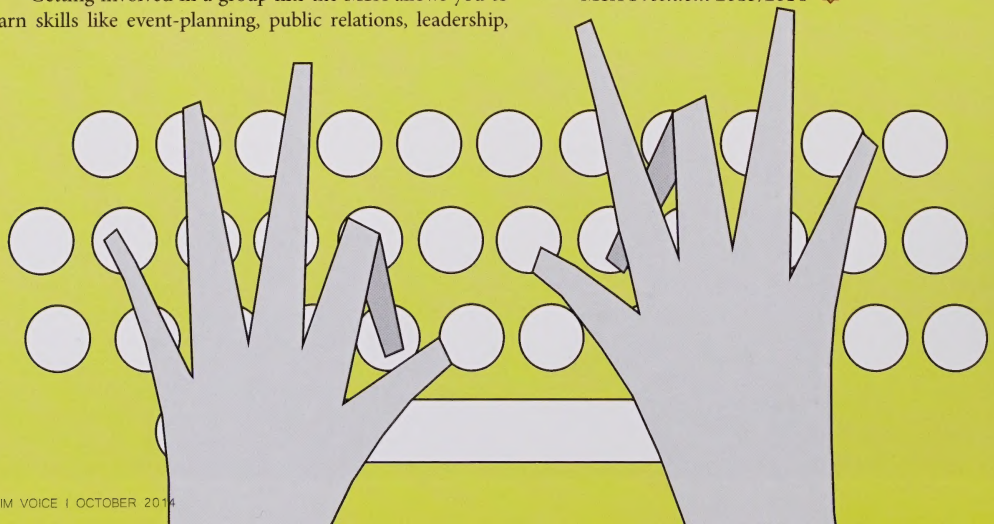
Ilyas Ally
MSA President 2008/2009

"I write all this with the hopes of providing a trajectory on how to make it so we pursue an education for the sake of Allah SWT. Ignorance is no longer a blessing we can enjoy after four years of university, because with knowledge comes great responsibility. We now have a means to think critically to create change for the better. So set your heart on just that – aspire to love your community and pursue a career where you can apply your knowledge to create change in society for the better, and ultimately serve your people to please Allah SWT"

Rifa Tahsina Ali
TMV Editor in Chief 2009/2010

"This entire organization and its purpose is summed up succinctly in the works of our beloved Prophet when he said, 'none of you [truly] believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself' [Bukhari]."

Zerzar Bukhari
MSA President 2013/2014



BY ELHAM ALI

MSA ALUMNI TALK

In honour of the University of Toronto Muslim Students Association's 50th Anniversary, some of the MSA's alumni are sharing their thoughts, memories and the challenges that they faced inside and outside of the MSA.

Full Name: Rizwan Mohammad
Years at U of T: 2000-2006
Undergraduate Study: Islamic History & Philosophy
Position in the MSA: General volunteer; TMV writer
What are you doing now? Studying Islam with local scholars; Strategy & Training for Project Communitas, a national youth-led inter-faith inter-cultural resiliency building initiative web communitas.ccmw.com twitter@PrjctCommunitas

You've been involved with the Muslim community at U of T for a long time, both as an undergraduate and a graduate student, so what have your experiences been like with the MSA both before and after graduation?

When I was an undergraduate student at the University of Toronto St. George, I had a complicated relationship with the MSA. I volunteered to help with events but I refused nominations to serve as an executive member. I had close friends on the MSA in general but my tendency was to be critical, to rebel, to observe, and comment as a writer and editor for the TMV. Despite my antics, I was treated with respect and patience by other members of the MSA. Ultimately, by the time I was graduating, I had come to feel like MSA members were an extended part of my family, a cousin close to my age that I fought with but also loved. How do you move on from your family? I guess I never really "moved on." I grew up. I didn't let go. I gave back.

In the years since my graduation in 2006, I've been honoured to train MSA leaders, deliver khutbas at Hart House, and teach halaqas. That was only possible because I experienced graduation not as a moment of closure and a transition to the next phase of my life, but as a natural milestone in an ever-changing relationship with a family member. As an alumnus, I've seen my relationship to the MSA community grow richer and more meaningful over the years as I've continued to learn from students, and found new ways of being of service to them. I'm grateful to see the MSA reach its 50th anniversary and I pray it continues to be a means of lasting benefit in this life and the Hereafter.

Full Name: Nafisa
Years at U of T: 2009-2014
Undergraduate Study: English and Islamic Studies
Position in the MSA: Vice President, External (2011-2012)
What are you doing now: Studying Education at York University

Tell us a story; what is your happiest memory of the MSA?

There's so many. One time after my classes finished and some time had gone by without me seeing anyone or being on campus, I went to an event. Once I got there, a whole bunch of people were really excited to see me and it was really heartwarming, I don't know how many people hugged me that day in like quick succession too

Another really special memory of mine is of a brother we recently lost, Ali Saeed. In our year in the exec we held a small party because it happened that like three people had birthdays at around the same time. So we all cooked together and ate together at Cumberland House. At some point while we were cooking, someone called him. "Ali Bhaiii! (Bhai means brother in Urdu) and he goes "Jii Behen!" (which means "Yes, sister!") It was just the sweetest and really highlighted who he was to us. A really gentle and helpful brother. May Allah have mercy on him.

We're also talking about relationships in this issue, what do you think is the most important tool necessary in having healthy relationships?

That's a good question. I think there's a lot of really important tools that one must have but I think at least one of the most important is forgiveness. You don't always understand sometimes why someone you love does something and you can't always communicate that something is hurtful or negative. Forgiveness is therefore important. It's not a case that you say to yourself that what a person did is okay but that you can't change the outcome no matter how much you grudge about it. It's also because forgiveness is sometimes what keeps relationships going. Those little arguments or disagreements are common especially when you really start to love a person, or some time goes by in a relationship and both people grow. Sometimes you just gotta let things go, especially in the moment of anger because that's when you can say something you'll really regret.

Full Name: Waqas Ullah Khan
Years at U of T: 2003-2007 (Undergraduate) + 2011-2012 (Masters of Science)
Undergraduate Study:
Position in the MSA: Orphan Sponsorship Program
What are you doing now: Studying Medicine and serving as MSA President at Trinity College, Dublin

What's been your biggest challenge maintaining your relationships after graduation?

Maintaining that rapport and keeping in touch with people, 'cause we no longer have this bubble of the university anymore that keeps us within, we're now exposed to another world and we don't have that luxury.

Can you clarify what you mean by rapport?

Being able to relate to each other, because in school you're so focused on your day to day, or what the challenges are in the university context, that you realize a lot of your conversations and how you get through and grow your bond with that person or with anybody is based on the university context or school. But now that you're no longer in school or you're in another school, how do you expand your communication to go beyond U of T? Is there a world beyond U of T? There is, and that's what you have to do is figure out what other things you have in common besides school and that's a real bond.

You're now involved in the MSA at your new school, how do you think that your experiences with the two MSAs compare or inform one another?

I think it's really exciting that I had exposure to the U of T MSA because I know now what works and what doesn't work so I actually extrapolate that information and apply it there in the new MSA context. But also, I can see things like the limiting factors ahead of time now, so I can actually see, again, "these are setbacks," and forecast much more accurately and effectively. But again, in the end of the day people are people and they're all different communities, so you can't impose one community's desires and wishes on another community's desires and wishes. So what I learned was just being receptive to your environment is important from this U of T MSA and I'm applying it to my new MSA. Being receptive, I think that's the fundamental crux of an MSA really, 'cause it's really about the community and if you don't work for the community and you just impose or dictate, then you're not an MSA.

Full Name: Aisha Raja
Years at U of T: 2009-2013
Undergraduate Study: Ethics, Society & Law, Political Science and Environmental Studies
Position(s) in the MSA: Director, Students for World Justice (2010-2011); Vice President Social Advancement (2011-2012); President (2012-2013)
What are you doing now: Studying Law at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

How have your experiences in the Muslim Students Association and the relationships you built at U of T left a lasting impact on you?

The MSA had a HUGE impact on me and my life during and even after university. I truly became the person I am today because of my involvement with the MSA. In terms of my per-

sonal self, my most cherished and close friends I met through the MSA, I learnt very important life lessons and gained a lot of wisdom through my involvement in the MSA. The person I will be spending the rest of my life with inshAllah I met through my involvement in the MSA as well. In terms of my professional life, all the job opportunities I had were through the connections I made in the MSA, and the job I got after finishing my degree was a large part due to the experiences I gained working through the MSA.

I feel extremely blessed and thank Allah swt everyday for giving me the opportunity to be involved with the MSA and to serve the Muslim community on campus. I truly believe there is so much barakah in the work that those involved in the MSA gain and it leaves a huge impact on you. The key is to do the work with ihsan, with sincerity and good intentions. I always say MSA gave me so much more than what I could ever give it.

Why is the MSA important to you? And why do you think it's important to the U of T community?

MSA was a huge part of me while I was doing my undergrad. It gave me that sense of belonging and purpose. I felt I was at university for a greater purpose, more than just to study and gain a degree. It gave me the platform to deeply get to know the Muslim community not only at U of T but the larger community. It gave me the opportunity to find out what the issues in the community are and do something about them. Most importantly it gave me a family, the people I met through the MSA were all kind of there for a similar purpose: to find community and work together on important issues which brought us all close together. While doing MSA work we spent more time with each other than with our own families. And that's why the MSA is so important for the U of T community. There's something for everyone and anyone to do. The MSA really makes you an agent of change and helps you to build that community that backs up the work you do. It makes your time at university worth so much more than a degree at the end of the day.

Full Name: Zerzar Bukhari
Years at U of T: 2009-2014
Undergraduate Study: Computer Engineering
Position in the MSA: Webmaster, President
What are you doing now: Software Development Engineer at Microsoft HQ

The theme of this issue is "Moving On", what's been your biggest challenge in moving on from the U of T community, and the relationships you'd built, after graduation?

I'm in a unique position here because right after graduating, I've actually moved south of the border to a city in which I have no friends or family. Needless to say, the transition is by no means an easy ordeal. But surprisingly, I haven't (yet) experienced the burst of "MSA bubble" as seems to be a common phenomenon amongst MSA alumni. I think if you balance your involvement in the MSA with other organizations, the impact of the "MSA bubble" pop is significantly smaller, so I definitely encourage people to do that. To answer the question, I think the hardest part has been letting go of the in-person interactions I've had with so many amazing people from MSA and U of T. In particular, there would always be late night dinner conversations at your local Hero burger regarding the MSA, or Muslims, or society in general which is a very fond memory I have of my time there.

We're also talking about relationships in this issue, what do you think is the most important tool necessary in having healthy relationships?

I think the most important thing to a relationship is honesty and trust. If you are honest with your friends, they will trust you, and you will likely trust them back. If you can do this, I guarantee you will have happy relationships. Of course, this is easier said than done, but there are a few major things you should do. Don't backbite about any of your friends, ever. Don't harbor ill feelings without expressing and resolving them. Don't bury conflicts without solving them. And don't be selfish.

Full Name: Asmaa Hussein
Years at U of T: 2003-2007 (undergrad) + 2008-2010 (Masters of Social Work)
Undergraduate Study: English and Sociology
Position(s) in the MSA: Editor-in-Chief, The Muslim Voice (2004-2005); Secretary (2005-06); Vice President, Sisters (2006-07)
What are you doing now: Contract Writer and stay at home Mom

What's been your biggest challenge in moving on from the U of T community, and the relationships you'd built, after graduation?

My biggest challenge moving on from the U of T community has been finding a job! I have been able to maintain most if not all the important relationships that I made during my time at U of T.

As a permanent member of the TMV family, what was your experience like with the magazine? Looking back, are there any memories that stand out, or anything you wish you could have done differently?

I wish that I didn't use clip-art pictures in the magazine! But in my defense, that was a different era completely! I particularly loved to work with talented writers and artists who contributed to the magazine. It gave me some great insight into the diverse talents that our community is blessed with. I would like to think that I developed many skills during my time with TMV – writing, editing, time-management, team/volunteer management, etc. overall it was a wonderful and beneficial experience!

JUST THE B

BY ELHAM MOHAMMAD ALI

Despite being a society and culture that glorifies the teenage years and describes the high school phase as the "most formative" of your identity, the reality is that those words better describe the university experience. Over this past summer, the last four months of my undergraduate career, hindsight became my only sight, and I found myself looking back on my time at the university in utter disbelief at all the changes and experiences that can be crammed into four or five short years. Alhamdulillah though, I am grateful for them all. The university experience is an interesting one because I believe that it tackles every aspect of a person, and it is virtually impossible to come out of it unchanged; spiritual, personal, academic and even financial changes are all a part of the deal as you move into adulthood and independence. It is this sudden push towards independence and the emphasis on forming strong individuals that also makes the university experience so challenging, I think. It reminds me of those stories I used to hear on TV, of the desert tribes who would send their young boys out into the wilderness when they'd come of age, alone with nothing but a knife to survive and come back as men. Or a more concrete example, look at the story of our own Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him), and in fact many other prophets as well, who'd had the support of his community for his entire life, until suddenly he was cast out and forced to make a way for himself and forge a new community on the new man that he was, sal'allahu alaihi wa'sallam. This is not to equate four years at U of T with a prophetic experience, but to provide an illustration of the way that the experience at U of T, and many other universities I am sure, can feel to students who immediately after leaving the communality of high school find themselves in a place where the emphasis is entirely on re-crafting them as an individual without any sort of supportive safety net to catch them. The university experience can be a scary and lonely one for sure, as despite the best efforts of the institution, universities simply do not favour community.

While it is, again, not the only example of a rampantly individualistic institution, I do truly think that U of T in particular is a good example of it because it is an institution that, despite its most valiant efforts, blatantly shuns social development and interactions in favour of individual academic achievement. Basically, all the clubs and student societies in the world could not mask the fact that at the end of the day, at U of T, it's every student for themselves. Regardless of the UTSU and ULife and the group shots sprinkled throughout the university's brochure, the university's very culture is steeped in individualism in the most obvious, and yet seemingly innocuous ways. It is everywhere! Scores of lamp posts within (and creeping outside the borders of) all three campuses are draped in the achievements of the successful alumni of which the university has no shortage, but these are all single shots of individual people and the achievements are theirs alone. There is no mention of an editing team in Margaret Atwood's banner where it hangs just on the edge of Victoria College, or of the wife who starred in so many of Atom Egoyen's films (and incidentally, did her masters at U of T). It's the "McLennan Physical Laboratories", not "McLennan and His Lab Assistants". John P. Robarts was only one member of a family I am sure, and yet the "John P. Robarts Research Library" is so specifically named ("Robarts" is just shorthand because what student has the time). The end result then is the feeling that at U of T, success is for the individual and of the individual with no thought towards support systems and relationships and the people who help us to succeed - though we all know that they are there and we all have them. What comes of that is a sense of isolation for students, one that is destructive, unproductive and inconducive to good mental health and higher success.

Now, despite being critical (and admittedly, a little bit sarcastic) I will not deny that theoretically, the University is a wonderful social setting and I cannot laud enough its attempts to foster social interactions and meaningful relationships for its students outside of the classroom; all jokes aside, ULife alone is a testament to this. But at the same time, the institution cannot deny its very nature, and as such, even with the clubs, student societies, sororities (I know, they do exist) and innumerable social events throughout the school year, for many people, U of T simply is not the ideal place to form meaningful relationships, there are just too many factors inherent in the university that work against them.

Firstly, the very size of the university is a massive (pun intended) obstacle in the building of healthy, strong relationships between students. I remember myself when I was in my first year, by sheer coincidence, a group of girls and I all happened to share two, sometimes even three of the same classes together throughout the year. Naturally then, since we were spending so much time together, we bonded over essays and TA complaints and we all became friends. In second year, again, much of the same group happened to have multiple classes together and we grew even closer, or so we thought. Come third year, none of us shared a single common class and the group dynamic died, we were all just too busy with our individual classes and activities, not to mention work outside of school, to meet up. Not only did we not have the time to plan proper outings, the campus is so big that the odds of running into someone are near negligible, so there is not even the chance of a brief, snatched conversation between classes. Now I know what the counter argument against this is, if students want meaningful relationships then they have to be willing to make the effort, but that is not as easy or obvious as it sounds as the pressure for individual success prevents this as well.

Probably the most egregious factor preventing strong social bonding in the university is its rigorous academic environment, very much inherent to the university. U of T, as every U of T stu-

dent knows, is one of the top ranked universities in the world and number one in Canada, no matter what McGill says. It has, again, produced numerous highly successful alumni and as such, has incredibly high standards for its current student body. These sky high standards can have one of two effects on students; for some, it can ignite in them the fire of aspiration, and drive them towards success, and no doubt this is probably what the university hopes for and intends. But for many other students, it can simply crush them under the pressure. The academic environment at U of T is stressful and it is competitive, everybody knows this, but what I think many do not realize is that, most of all, it is all consuming. Being a full time student is just that, a full time job. Between 5 to six lectures a week, not to mention tutorials, heavy readings, labs, tests and mere weeks separating the beginning, middle and end of terms, there is little to no down time and even less time for the extracurriculars that are designed to act as a buffer against the stress the university causes, so that which is meant to provide a support system for struggling students becomes inaccessible because you're too busy struggling! There are also alternative systems outside of the university, particularly social media, that are also meant to act as ways of providing social interactions and bonds for students, but in my experiences, they are shallow replacements for actual human relationships, particularly because they emphasize quantity over quality and do little to fix the problem of isolation. What students need is meaningful relationships, and while university can be the perfect place to achieve those, the individualistic nature of the university does not foster them and so band-aid solutions like Facebook are looked to to solve the problem, but often only serve to intensify the isolation that many students can feel by blocking them from real human contact which is what we are all truly looking for.

The entire institution calls to mind the image of the Uroboros, an ancient symbol depicting a snake or dragon eating its own tail, representative of the "vicious cycle". Much in the same way that the snake in the image destroys itself as it tries to feed, for students, it can feel like there is no way to win within the system; a rigorous academic environment means that much of your time is devoted to work with little left for social bonding, so your relationships suffer, I know mine did. But at the same time, to try and give any time to social interaction means cutting into your academic time, and so your grades suffer and so do your chances of "success". Throw in a part time job and you're basically ready to implode, the stress becomes overwhelming and everything collapses; your studies, relationships and personal health are all suffering. Call it what you want, a vicious cycle, catch-22, double bind, the point is that sometimes it can feel like no balance can be struck between these two extremely important aspects of the university experience, the academic and the social. And the most unfortunate aspect of this whole thing is that, in many cases, or in my case at least, you don't see the snake for what it is until it's too late.

Alhamdulillah, my four years with the university are up, having just finished my last undergraduate course this past summer. Looking back, I can see the struggles I faced for what they were, difficult but also rewarding because I have grown through them, and I am happy to say that I am not the same person now that I was during my own frosh week. At the same time though, as my undergraduate career was winding down and I found myself thinking back on my last two years in particular (for me they were the most stressful), what stood out was how much of that time I had spent alone. My constant companion throughout my most difficult times, I realize now, has always been my computer, and I am sad, but not ashamed, to admit that the number of deeply connected and meaningful relationships that I have accrued over my four years and a summer at the University of Toronto, take up not even one hand. It is remarkably depressing to think back on all that time and wonder now if it was all worth it, wonder how I could ever think that a fraction of four and a piece of pretty paper could ever fill the void left by a friend.

There is, however, a happy ending to this story, and that is graduation! The interesting thing about U of T in particular is that, while many describe it as a "bubble", and one they never want to return to once they leave, I see it more as a nation within itself, one with very lax immigration laws. The beautiful thing about the university is that it has no restrictions on age, class, gender or area code; where in elementary and high school you were essentially barred from re-entry once you graduated and the passage of time alone singled you out if you ever did return, university has no such limitations, nor the physical boundaries of concrete walls to decide who belongs and who does not. Basically, returning to the university after graduation is incredibly easy. Moreover, the university provides ample opportunities for alumni to get involved, even more if you are a new graduate and have connections with present student societies and networks. The MSA is a fantastic example of this, as is its offshoot, the Muslim Chaplaincy, where many alumni return to act as advisers, speakers, and managers in the two. Being graduated myself now, I can attest to how much easier it is to be socially active when you haven't got 3 papers and a midterm breathing down your neck; I had always wanted to get involved with the TMV as an undergrad, but could never find the time, but now that I've graduated, it's far easier for me and they have been more than welcoming. The thing with U of T's thriving social environment is simply that it's a lot easier, and more enjoyable; to experience it when you are no longer in the university, and that is possible. With all the opportunities provided for getting involved, graduation is, therefore, not really the end of the university experience, but in a way, it is just the beginning of *a* university experience, and one that is just as good as any other.

AFTER GRADUATION:

TIPS FOR GROWTH AFTER UNIVERSITY

BY NORA S. FATHALIPOUR

Personal growth in an Islamic context is always centred around serving the wider community and drawing closer to Allah (swt). Therefore, discussing personal development in a university context can be somewhat awkward. We Muslims value and encourage increased self-awareness, self-knowledge and talents, and improving skills and health, but we like to tie all this self-improvement to a higher purpose. According to the hadith in Malik's *Muwatta*, it was reported that the Prophet (pbuh) said, "I was sent for the perfection of character" (Muwatta, 1614), so part of reaching the higher objectives of Islamic personal development is to perfect our character and manners. However, personal growth in the university, while not completely self-centred, emphasises how personal growth can elevate *you,* and somewhat neglects the benefits to the community you find yourself in. While the following is on the personal, and not strictly "spiritual", I will explore how personal growth is tied to greater spiritual development, and the challenges you encounter as you try to cultivate both after graduating.

"Personal growth" is a term that pretty much sums up the university experience. There is something very empowering and dignifying about learning to improve and utilise skills, and to be in an environment that fosters that is a privilege and a blessing. Partly because of that, leaving university was the scariest thing to ever happen to me. University was my "home". My safe space. The place where I had support. "Out there" was life, stripped of the compassion and common goals that my peers in university provided me with and shared with me. Or so I thought. Moving on in life doesn't mean you have to leave behind the identity you built for yourself while at university. Personal development is directly linked to spiritual development, something Muslims recognise. But from what I have seen, it is easy to start neglecting the need for personal development once you leave university. It's difficult to find time when you're busy building a worldly life; careers, debt, looking for or getting used to living with a new spouse, moving out, losing your university network, and other factors, mean you have much more responsibility and less security than you have ever had before. Couple that with what for many is a loss of compassionate and friendly support, as they have less and less contact with the friends they made at university, and many end up in a state of panic or anxiety (if you think exam nerves are the worst you'll ever feel, think again). This doesn't mean you stay anxious for a very long time necessarily, though some anxiety can in itself be your path to relief. In the Quran, Allah (swt) says, "So truly where there is hardship there is also ease; truly where there is hardship there is also ease" (Quran, 94:5-6). Becoming a university student and leaving the university both come with their own forms of hardships, but also different opportunities for growth.

You don't need many things to grow. Naturally, growth always makes me think of plants (pun totally intended). Plants need an appropriate environment and constant care. If you've ever had the privilege of caring for plants in a garden, you will have noticed that almost every week you have to weed around the roots, and every now and then a cheeky mouse comes and takes a bite off of it. We're much the same, humans. Just like each plant has different requirements, so do different people have varying needs. What matters is that you find the appropriate environment for your continued growth, and this has often less to do with locality and geography than it has to do with the level of contact you have with other people, and whether they are the right kind to help you grow. As with plants, you need to establish constant self care, weeding out what takes up unwanted space and steals your energy.

Perhaps, like myself, you have graduated already, or perhaps you're graduating in a few months. You might be wondering what you're supposed to do now, if you'll ever find that dream job, and if you'll ever waste as much money on lunch again. Or perhaps, like so many others, your most burning question is: "How can I continue to be the me that I became at university, once I've left?" Let's be honest: the university experience is something truly unique. To paraphrase a contemporary scholar, Shaykh Yahya Rhodus, there is something *different* about an environment where everyone is learning, and which is centred on scholarship. Compared to such an environment, other places seem to lack a certain vibrancy. Many of us find that the university environment was exactly what we needed in order to develop into a more level-headed, responsible, but also passionate and caring, person. The university also provides the safe space to learn to trust and to be ourselves. If our teenage years were the time of insecurity and anxiety, our university years are surely a time of polishing and cultivation, whereby the insecurity and anxiety we had gradually diminish. So don't be surprised if some of the old insecurities return or you feel like you can't find where you fit in once you leave this environment. While insecurities can tend to make us

oblivious to the needs of others, our own personal growth is directly tied to maintaining relationships, especially after you graduate.

As the world around us becomes ever obsessed with individuals and personalisation, entire industries are created that make us forget how we depend on each other to survive in so many ways. My mother recently reminisced about the time she gave birth to me; she said there were around ten people – all professionals - in the room as it happened, making sure we were both safe and would survive. So many people present, just for one tiny baby who didn't even have a name yet. SubhanAllah. While the rest of the world is obsessed with providing you with everything you need to survive on your own, to create a fortress so you can cope and succeed, don't forget that you're more than your job description and your degree(s). I'm not saying you shouldn't be advancing your career, but use it as a means to serve others, either through the work you do or through the relationships you build at work and the transferable skills you gain. I've seen people who work for multi-national companies using their IT and graphic design skills to create effective web sites and advertisements for charities and political campaigns in their spare time. I know there are university professors who volunteer to plan and prepare trails where people can walk and discover the hidden beauty in their local flora and fauna, with minimal impact on the physical environment. The best way you can work towards continued personal growth once you leave university, is to pay back your rent for the life you were gifted, as Muhammad Ali put it.

As the world becomes seemingly more connected globally, we have become disconnected locally. Have you ever walked along the paths in your neighbourhood, discovered the wild plants and birds that are both native and visitors to it? Did you check if you have any neighbours who are recent immigrants here, to see if they have appropriate support to cope with life in this, for them, strange new country? When the summer breeze wafted the succulent scents of your barbequed chicken, and carried with it the sounds of laughter you and your friends made, did you knock on the door of and offer food and company to the lonely widow next door? I think the "self" has no meaning without connecting the self to the people in your time, the people before you, and the people who will come after you. Your story, your life, did not start with you. It started with the people who came before you. And your legacy will not end when you die; through your actions you live in the memory of the people who will come after you. Why is a smile so precious in our tradition, precious enough for the Prophet (peace be upon him) to mention its charitable value? Part of it is recognising how one small act you do can uplift and elevate others, which in turn can only help you. I truly believe that personal growth that is not connected to how you can serve others, will prove itself to be inadequate to address your long term needs. Sure, improving your fitness level and your French skills are both admirable goals – especially since improved fitness means you can carry the groceries of the Ukrainian grandmother next door, and you can tutor the little boy across your house who just moved here from Taiwan – for free! Personal growth is often linked to confidence and fulfilment of goals. When you become actively engaged in what is happening in your own environment, and see the beauty of life reflected in the kindness of ordinary people, you will become more confident. When you help others and lift them up, you fulfil the highest goal you can ever have, which is to please Allah (swt).

PHOTO // ADEL KESHAVARZ

To be honest, personal growth is something I think about every day. Not because I'm so excellent at it, but because it's a serious and constant struggle. It's not always a given that you'll know where to go or what to do. If you've moved recently, like me, it takes time to find the avenues and methods that help you cultivate a better version of you. And a lot of it is practice and comes from real life experience. Sometimes it takes you thinking "why am I sitting on my own having frozen pizza when there's a whole world out there?" The next day, you shake it off, catch a random bus somewhere and see some strangers doing selfless deeds and it makes you think about the person you want to be. At university you see it every day, "out there" sometimes you have to actively seek it. A lot of the time, even at university, we look to others to be inspired to be better versions of ourselves. Whether it was from hearing a Hadith quoted during a Friday sermon led by a young khateeb, or it was a friend casually slipping money into the donation jar at the museum (do museums in Canada have those? I mean, since entrance isn't free, cough, cough), you probably found yourself inspired several times a week. Actively seeking inspiration is essential for growth, so you have to really take initiative and put yourself out there after you graduate. Take care of yourself. Your mental and physical health, and probably in that order. Make yourself available to receive and show generosity. Learn something new as often as you can - even if you're never going back to university. Buy really nice sandwiches and coffee for the homeless (or otherwise disadvantaged) people you see on the street - I mean really nice sandwiches, those artisanal ones you love so much (you spent like 30 bucks on those totally unnecessary pants last week, let's be real here). When you share your time, your skills, your resources with others, you will grow. Because we humans grow better together. And some growth only comes from first shedding the heavy burden of dependence on material things.

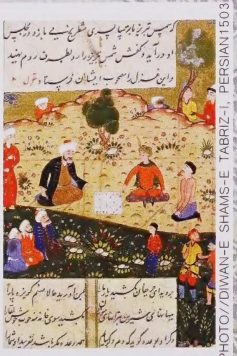
There are some pets you have to buy at least a pair of - they just can't live alone. Not only do they get lonely, but they don't develop survival or social skills if they don't have someone else to learn from and with. There's a Beatles song; the chorus goes, "I get by with a little help from my friends" - it applies to us children of Adam, too, not just the wee pets. Therefore, the best tip I can give you for your life after university is to seek the company of good people and to put yourself in situations where you are forced to serve and to give. I hope and pray you have excellent experiences at university, and that your life during and after is filled with opportunities for you to learn, grow and share.

PERSONAL GROWTH AND RELATIONSHIPS

SOME LESSONS LEARNED

BY OMAR QASHSHOU

PHOTO // FROM DIVAN OF HAFEZ, PERSIAN, 1585



PHOTO//DIWAN-E SHAMS-E TABRIZ-I, PERSIAN1503

PHOTO // PHILLIP MAIWALD

We've most likely all heard this and similar narrations of hadiths, and it's one of those sayings that never seems to get old - most likely because it's true. What constitutes perfection in character? For Muslims, the answer lies in the virtues of the Prophet (SAWS) who's mission was to guide believers to Allah and demonstrate perfection in character. Reflecting on my own life and how relationships have impacted me and helped me grow, I have come to understand that I always have a choice as to how I react to a given situation but will never be able to determine exactly with will happen to me tomorrow. I can have a plan but its execution is never guaranteed. Part of excellence in character is how we react and interact with the environment around us and the situations with which we are presented with on a daily basis. So it goes with relationships – not just with loved ones but more broadly speaking our approach to dealing with others in general.

Some life lessons I have learned thus far...

Fear Based Approach to Relationships Do Not Work

The fear of being rejected, not being accepted, fear of not fitting in, fear of missing out on something that I believe only someone else can provide, etc. I have enough experience in life to at least know this much. – Fear Based Approach to Relationships Do Not Work! They just don't.

Unfortunately, reading about this and hearing similar advice from friends and family was not enough for me, experience had to be the teacher yet again.

Our relationships with others are never divorced from the relationship we have with ourselves and with Allah

A healthy appreciation of who I am allows me to best understand what I can provide to a given ambience and environment and what I can take from that environment. Previously, I have noticed when I felt uncomfortable with myself I tended to be a lot more sensitive to what other people had to say and as a result I was not as able to handle rejections or disappointments in a manner that did not prolong negative emotions or responses.

Giving of oneself implies a sense of spiritual freedom

Being stingy is looked down upon in the Muslim community, in part because it implies fear of what is to happen in the future. Trust in God usually implies being comfortable knowing that God will provide for us even if we do not know what is yet to come - this of course does not mean we should not plan in the present moment or put in our best effort. I have learned over time that people who give of themselves sincerely tend to be free, particularly people that truly give of themselves for the sake of God. Whereas those who are stingy tend to be dominated by that very thing they are hoarding.

Relationships are among the best opportunities I can think of where we can get a chance to truly give of ourselves and put into practice the teachings of Islam. It may sound a bit crazy at first to some –

> "The best of people are those with the most excellent character." (Tabarani, Sahih)

that is to focus more on giving rather than taking, yet an approach focused more on giving does in fact work especially when the first steps are taken with sincerity (that is for the sake of God).

These past few years I started to focus more on giving rather than taking - since my previous approach resulted in too many negative feelings, the kind that helped me understand that I needed to change. Of course I still have a lot more work to do! However I can now confidently say from experience that since focusing less on what I felt people owe me and focusing more on what I have to offer, I have been liberated from expending as much energy on negative emotions that wear me down and have received an overall better responses from others. Many times we care what others say mainly for selfish reasons. Thus, I think there is some Barakah (Divine Grace) in being disappointed sometimes by others, if one can say that, as it may be a sign that we are placing too much emphasis in the wrong place and have not reached a point where we are comfortable with ourselves.

The Prophet's (SAWS) teachings are available to those who search for them

Spiritual virtues are universal. From an Islamic perspective, the first human being – Adam (AS) – was also the first prophet -the main reason for revelations was due our own forgetfulness. The cardinal sin in Islam is in fact forgetfulness. That is forgetfulness of what we really are and forgetfulness of our remembrance of God. Reflecting upon the life and teachings of the Prophet and consciously striving to better oneself accordingly – with sincerity, which cannot be stressed enough- will be of great aid to all of us who want to better ourselves and come closer to being in a state of inner peace and contentment which will radiate outward in the way we deal with our lives and our relationships.

When it comes to relationships and personal growth the example of the Prophet (SAWS) should never be forgotten since he is the perfect being (al-Insān al-Kāmil) and there are always relevant teachings from his life and sayings that can be put to use in our lives.

How we deal with people and situations has a lot to do with our mode of being

Our understanding of Islam and what we believe to be true is reflected in our very being not only in what we think discursively and the external acts that we are required to perform. There is always room for improvement in continuing to adorn ourselves with the attributes that will allow us to better realize the teachings of Islam and in focusing more on giving and less on taking.

The example of the Prophet (SAWS) provides an excellent framework and the books of hadith and the works of many of the most influential traditional Islamic scholars (such as Ghazali) and spiritual teachings of individuals such as Rumi confirm that some of the most important characteristics to emulate in order to better realize and internalize the Truth that Islam expounds include: being generous and kind to others, being patient when dealing with others, not feeling personally offended and especially maintaining a strong sense of humility. I only emphasize this because it should be made clear that those who follow the example of the Prophet (SAWS) sincerely always have an example to help guide them and teachings that can be put to use to help improve character and as a result have more to offer in the relationships they have in life.

To conclude are two passages which I hope will provide inspiration to the reader. May this be a reminder of the inherent wisdom of practicing and actualizing the virtues of the Prophet (SAWS) as much as is possible – virtues that come from God. Teachings that can help us in bettering our environment, our relationships and ourselves. Now putting it into practice is the hard part. To be or not to be that is the question. Note to self: much easier to read and write about doing a selfless act then it is to be selfless!

These passages are from Chapter 9: Role and Character of The Blessed Prophet of the book Muhammad: Man of God by Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

"He – The Blessed Prophet- always emphasized humility although he was the greatest of men and certainly aware of his own nature. But much of his Sunnah and the adab or manner of acting associated with it exists for the purpose of inculcating the virtue of humility whose highest form is our awareness of our nothingness before God, symbolized also by the prostrations during the daily prayers.

The Blessed Prophet was also full of generosity and magnanimity. To the same extent that he was strict with himself he was generous with others. Nobility of character implies both giving and forgiving, the giving of oneself and one's efforts, thoughts and belongings to others and the forgiving of the faults of others and what they have done to one's person."-Nasr 76

"The character of the Blessed Prophet, adorned by the virtues of sincerity, generosity and humility or truthfulness, nobility and simplicity, was also touched by the perfume of kindness and the effusion of happiness by which he is remembered to this day throughout the Islamic world."-Nasr 77

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. Muhammad: Man of God. Chicago, IL: KAZI Publications, Inc, 1995

BECOMING A GREAT COMMUNICATOR

BY AMINA ALLALOU

When I was in grade 9, the beginning of my rebellious years, my tech teacher would say something I have never forgotten.

With confidence, he moved away from the bench so we had a full view of his body. He then announced the nature of reality, with no sugar coating.

"Many of you have dreams. However, you may or may not accomplish them, money being a huge factor. But there is one skill you need to keep in mind if you are to succeed in this life."

He related how he once asked a 'successful' friend "What is the most important skill someone can acquire?"

The friend had paused for a moment, reflected, then replied "Communication."

I kind of scoffed. After all, we aren't really graded on "communication". Your emotional intelligence, social insight and political influence are not part of your transcript. More likely than not, as long as are able to write and memorize, you can do excellent academically. Besides, whenever we are asked to share our goals, some may say architect, teacher, doctor, marriage, but no one would ever say "my goal is to be a great communicator".

This event would unfortunately become buried in the back of my mind for many years, until I graduated university with stellar achievement, yet failed interview after interview. That called for some serious introspection. See, I could communicate as an academic, as a friend, as a daughter, but not as a professional. I didn't understand branding. I lacked the lingo – that balance between diplomacy and authenticity, confidence and compromise, seriousness and humour, pauses and action.

Only then did it dawn on me, that to be great at anything, truly ANYTHING, requires you to be a Great Communicator. Great marriages have great casual and intimate communication. Great teachers know "how to talk" to students. Great physicians "get" patients. Great friends "know what to say". Great parents "understand".

Let's face it, being a great communicator doesn't come naturally to most of us. With an approximately 40% divorce rate and the number of litigations skyrocketing, the education system would do well to make "Effective communication" a mandatory part of the curriculum. This is not the same as being extroverted. Think shady car salesman - you really want to buy a car, but feel so pressured by his style to buy THAT ONE and NOW. Good communication may involve influence, but always involves mutual respect.

So what does it mean to be a great communicator? Is it that marriage is really a fool's paradise? Is it always their fault for not getting that job? Are kids by nature naughty, rebellious and emotionally unstable? Is it all a conspiracy?

Maybe, if upon the first bite of the apple of discord, we educated ourselves, and recognized the thundering sound for what it really is: the four hoursemen of the apocalypse. Maybe if we invested in discovering that that love has more than one language, we could save our marriages.*

**Please refer to Chapman's work on the 5 languages of love, and to Gottman's work on recognizing the 4 horsemen. For convenience, the latter are listed below. These behaviours are found to consistently predict the end of a relationship:*

1. Criticism: as opposed to a complaint, criticism is global. It attacks the person, not the behaviour that caused the issue.

2. Contempt: Primarily through non-verbal behaviour, this communicates disgust. Examples include sarcasm, sneering, eye rolling and condescension.

3. Defensiveness: This is when a partner avoids responsibility for their own behaviour by pointing out something their partner did wrong prior to their complaint.

4. Stonewalling: In other words, disengagement. The stonewaller acts like they could care less what happens to their partner. Tuning out effectively destroys the relationship.

Maybe, during that dispute at work, if we separated people from the problem, focused on interests and not positions, and used an objective criteria, we could be shown yes, instead of the door.**

Maybe, when that little one screams for that toy, we gave them words for their feelings, gave it to them in their fantasy, and provided specific praise, we could actually take them to the mall with wallets intact.***

***Fisher, Ury and Patton's book "Getting to Yes" offers invaluable tips for developing negotiation skills.*

Communication is an art. The complexity of language is really unique to the human species, how we learn it remains a mystery. No wonder Allah's final miracle to mankind is a book - ever as proof of what perfect communication looks like. The Arabs at that time, who prided themselves in a language so mathematical yet, where presented with a text in a code they could not decipher nor replicate. They still can't.

Remember though, ultimately it all comes down to practice. True, you'll probably misread signs, make wrong turns - probably not worse than mine - but ultimately, you'll be glad you're on the road. Allah helps those who help themselves.

****A classic, Faber and Mazlish's book "How to Talk so Kids will Listen, and Listen so Kid's will Talk" has benefitted countless parents and educators alike.*

FALLING OUT, LETTING GO

BY AMINA ALLALOU

PHOTO // RYAN MCGUIR

A friend, upon their return from Umrah, gave me dates. Delighted to be remembered, I ate them with love. As I treasured them, I treasured the date seed, literally inscribed it with the word Love.

My father looked upon the gift, and with a flat dismissal said I was given bad dates - there were much better ones in Medina. I felt a bit apprehensive; for gifts, isn't it the thought that counts?

Later, I would fall out with this friend - I finally understood that I was not loved, but admired. See, when in admiration, you enjoy the sun together. When in love, you weather the storm together. Yet, as the wind grew in strength, as the waves coalesced to huge heights, she did something I never imagined – abandon ship. Outside of her stonewall fortress, I was barred. Adrift, confused, I undertook the journey to the sacred House, and prayed that I accept whatever He decreed.

Oh how great the dates I came across! We had barely walked into our lodgings, when the receptionist passed on honeyed dates. In the stores, the variety was astounding…and I understood. God promises better what you let go for His sake.

Upon my return, sure enough, a gentle voice would emerge in my life. During her own journey to the sacred house, she remembered me, and once back, approached me with a gift. Boxed Ajwa dates, chosen with much care and affection. I knew this was no coincidence.

I gazed at the date seed from her I once loved. I recalled a beautiful heart… that chose to harden. I took the seed, and planted it by a tree I held dear. Enveloped in God's land, maybe one day she will soften, sprout, grow, branch, and flower.

Only, my tears would not be there to water it.

muslimstudents' ASSOCIATION

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The TMV and MSA have strived – the MSA since 1965, the TMV since 1993 - to serve the U of T community to promote brotherhood and engaged activity for the betterment of our community.

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day and the Angels and the Book and the Messengers; to spend of your substance out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask; and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayers and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which you made; and to be firm and patient in pain (or suffering) and adversity and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God fearing.

[Quran, 2: 177]

PHOTO // AMMAR ELAMIR

TO BE CONTINUED...